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AN

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ANISWER

TO

DR. ROTHEN A. M.

APOLOGY

[Three Qu. Shilling and Six Pence.]

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AN  
ANSWER  
TO  
Dr. ROTHERAM'S  
APOLOGY  
FOR THE  
Athanasian Creed;  
IN A  
LETTER TO A FRIEND.

*Supposed to be written by The Rev. J. Adams  
of Shrewsbury*

Nunquam verecundiores debemus esse quam cum de deo  
agitur.

Dr. ROTHERAM from SENECA.

L O N D O N:

Printed for T. CADELL, in the Strand; and S. BEADON,  
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MDCCLXXIII.

ANSWER

APOLLO

Armonian Creed;



LETTER to a FRIEND

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A N

A N S W E R

T O

## Dr. Rotheram's Apology, &amp;c.

DEAR SIR,

I Return you Dr. Rotheram's Pamphlet, accompanied, as you desire, with such remarks as occurred to me on the reading it. I ought perhaps to be ashamed of not having sooner perused this celebrated Apology; but the truth is, I have long contracted a dislike to controversial writings on this subject: having been often offended by the bold and familiar manner in which the Majesty of

B

Heaven

Heaven seems to me invaded and violated, by those who pretend to teach and explain the mysteries of the divine nature, and dictate what we must believe of things which pass all understanding. When I read the different systems of Godhead which Dr. Sherlock, South and Waterland have laid out for us, I am apt to fear that I am treading upon holy ground, and to revolt at my own presumption in daring to penetrate within the veil, and to pry, as it were, into the ark of God itself. With these sensations I have often closed the more curious disquisitions of this kind, when I have attempted to read them; and never without astonishment at the pride of human learning, soaring above the sphere of revelation as well as reason, and measuring Heaven and the Heaven of Heavens with a span.

You have taught me to respect the character of Dr. Rotheram as a serious as well as able divine, otherwise there is an air of  
ease

ease and confidence, and a freedom from all embarrassment assumed through his work, which, if it doth not border upon levity, seems to comport but ill with a subject involved beyond all other in obscurity and difficulty. And if he had less exerted his powers of oratory, and contented himself with plain argument and perspicuity in a theological inquiry after truth, I should have liked his composition the better. There is surely a pedantry in a needless display of misplaced eloquence, as well as in a pomp and parade of erudition where it is not wanted.

OUR apologist finds no difficulty in the Athanasian Creed. “ It is calculated to remove difficulties and casts light all around : “ it is so far from raising scruples and perplexing the understanding with doubts, “ that it is plainly calculated to give relief “ and satisfaction to them :—no rigour or severity. “ It meets us with an air of benevolence,

“nevolence, and shews an indulgence to  
 “reason, which no Creed besides this hath  
 “done. It is big with arguments to inform  
 “the understanding;—a chain of clear rea-  
 “soning; a regular composition where prin-  
 “ciples, arguments and conclusions are duly  
 “arranged: and has the style, method and  
 “structure of close argument throughout.  
 “The doctrine of the Trinity is not forced  
 “upon our assent, but it’s truth is estab-  
 “lished by a demonstration. Other Creeds  
 “are content to lay down their several ar-  
 “ticles in an affirmative manner, without  
 “supporting them by argument, or infer-  
 “ring their truth from clearer principles §.”  
 But this, it seems, leads you by the hand,  
 and initiates you by easy steps in all the  
 mysteries of the Trinity.

THIS is the Picture which the Author  
 hath given us of his favourite Creed. A  
 Painter is allowed, provided he keeps up a  
 likeness, to add some graces to a portrait

§ P. 67, 68, 80, 83, 87.

that

that wants it. Let us see then what resemblance to this flattering piece may be found in the original.

THE Creed begins,—*Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholick Faith, which Faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.* And again,—*Whosoever will be saved must thus think of the Trinity.* And again,—*Furthermore it is necessary to everlasting salvation, that he believe rightly the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.* And in the conclusion,—*This is the catholick Faith: which except a man believe faithfully he cannot be saved.*

THIS is the benevolent aspect with which this Creed salutes, and with which it leaves us. Here is no reserve of hope in the goodness of God; no retreat left open to his uncovenanted mercies; no resource for him that is weak in the Faith, however pious and upright in his intentions, however sincere in  
his

his inquiries after truth and in his desire to please God. *Whofo falleth not down and worshipping shall be cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.*

It is true, that the Author endeavours to soften these harsh features by allowing that the ignorant cannot be involved in this condemnation; that it extends only to those who have enjoyed the means of knowing the Gospel: and adds farther, not without a sufficient call for it, that by laying too great stress upon Faith it by no means supersedes the necessity, or extenuates the obligations to a holy life. To all this I agree. But nothing of all this appears in the Creed. This is therefore a mask, and not the aspect of the Creed; which is, as we have seen, fierce and menacing; holding out every thing that is terrible to our fears, without one ray of comfort to the feeble-minded: whose Faith may not be able to support him walking  
upon

upon the waves, or preserve him from sinking in this great deep.

BUT the same then we are told is the aspect of the Gospel; which gracious as it is, “ smiles not indiscriminately on all, but “ extends her favours only to all believers ‡ .” “ We cannot be at a loss, saith our Author, “ to point out the original passage of Scripture from which this is copied. It is the “ very language of our LORD when he gave “ his last commission to his Apostles. *He “ that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, “ but he that believeth not shall be damned* || .”

But, “ he that believeth not what? Undoubtedly the Gospel or the preaching of “ the Apostles. We cannot understand it “ otherwise † .” For the words of our LORD which introduce these are, *Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized, \* &c.* Is then believing the Gospel and believing the Athanasian Creed the same thing? If they

‡ P. 84. || P. 60. † P. 64. \* Mark xvi. 15, 16.

are not, the denunciation of our LORD and that of the Creed do not speak the same language. They are directed to different objects: and this argument falls to the ground.

WE have the Author's leave to suppose, that there are many pious Christians who sincerely believe the Gospel and all the doctrines which they find delivered in it, who are yet slow of heart to believe in the Athanasian form. " There are some, faith  
 " he, who are strenuous for the total ex-  
 " clusion of this Creed and the opinions it  
 " maintains: others whose objections lie not  
 " so much against the doctrines delivered  
 " in it as against the manner in which they  
 " are explained and enforced. They would  
 " readily assent, in general terms, to the doc-  
 " trine of the Trinity as revealed in Scrip-  
 " ture, but can by no means bring them-  
 " selves to join in all those subtleties and  
 " endless distinctions into which it is here  
 drawn

“ drawn out, and all those hard conditions  
 “ with which it is bound upon their minds.”

“ Far from censuring their doubts, I acknowledge that there seems to me a merit in them.” Now all these, however they may fall under the anathema of this creed, as they have here fairly won the pity and even the praise of their candid adversary, may, I trust, have likewise a good hope and confidence towards God; and are certainly not under the curse denounced by our Saviour against those who reject his Gospel.

IF the author will be satisfied with our believing the gospel, which is plainly all that is required here by our Saviour, I shall leave him to his own construction of the rest of this passage: which however I am persuaded speaks a different language from the condemnatory clauses, as he chuses to call them, of this creed.

HE need not I am sure be told, that by salvation in the new testament is not always meant that state of endless happiness in the next world, which is now usually understood by that term. The primary sense of this word and that which we must suppose it to convey in the apostles time is no more than that of deliverance; a deliverance from some evil suffered or danger apprehended. And the word which is here opposed to this has, in the original, a much softer meaning than is here given it by our translators: and in every other place of the new testament in which it is frequently used, is understood to mean only *judged* or *condemned*. And if salvation is here to be understood in a limited and restrained sense, we must certainly for the same reason interpret the latter part of the text of condemnation in general, or an exclusion from those privileges implied in the promises here made to believers in the gospel.

LET

LET us see then what was the import of that salvation or deliverance which was promised to the first converts of christianity, upon their believing and being baptized. To learn this we must enquire from what evils or dangers they were freed by the gospel. And the principal of these were the guilt of their past sins, and the fear of that punishment which was due in consequence of them.

As the design of the christian Religion was to call men to a life of holiness and virtue, so to encourage their future obedience, an universal pardon was offered to all, at the first preaching the gospel, for their past offences. This remission of sins that were past, or as it is in the epistle to the Hebrews, of transgressions that were under the first Testament, is all that is meant by being justified by Faith and saved by Faith, in the writings of the Apostles.

And in this the privileges conferred by baptism are often summed up in the Gospel. *Repent and be baptized for the remission of sins. Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord* §. This cleansing of the inward man from the guilt and pollution of sin seems to have been principally intended by the emblem of baptism: in which the outward ablution of water significantly represented the washing away of sin—the sprinkling from an evil conscience. This then, together with the other privileges of the Gospel belonging to christians in this life, is the only salvation promised to faith or conferred at baptism. It related only to those who should be converted from Jews or Gentiles to the christian religion; who had a pardon granted them for their past sins, were admitted into a state of favour and acceptance with God; and had indeed farther eternal hap-

§ Acts xxii. 16.

piness

piness promised to them, but upon the condition, not of believing only and being baptized, but living also a christian life of holiness and obedience.

THIS then is all that seems to be meant by salvation in the former part of this text. And by parity of reason, the sentence denounced against unbelievers in the latter part to which this is plainly coextended and stands throughout in opposition, can mean no more than an exclusion from the privileges conferred on those who believed the Gospel. *He that believeth not shall be judged or condemned*: that is, his sin shall be upon him. He is yet in his sins. He shall answer for them at the righteous judgment of God.

THE original words here in question are used numberless times in the greek translation of the old testament: and never signify any thing more than a temporary deliverance  
from

from some present or impending evil, and judgment or condemnation in general. And this translation was so far known and approved by the evangelists and apostles, that most of the places in which they refer to the law and the prophets are cited from it. It is therefore reasonable to believe, that they used these words in the same sense in which they were before used in the sacred writings: and that when they intended any particular deliverance, especially of so high an import as this before us, they would make it plain by the context, as I think they have always done in the first of these cases, by eternal salvation, or the salvation of the soul; in the latter by eternal damnation, the damnation of hell, or the resurrection of damnation.

I HAVE dwelt the longer on this remarkable text, as it appears to be the only proof on which our apologist hath rested his defence

sence of this part of the Athanasian Creed. And from his dislike of the expression *dam-natory*, the title usually given to the clauses which we have been considering, he would, I am persuaded, be glad to interpret them, if possible, to the same favourable meaning.

LET us now proceed with our apologist to the doctrinal part of the creed.

*Now the catholick Faith is this: that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance.* This then, says our commentator, is the thing to be proved, that the doctrine of the trinity is a part of that common faith which all are bound to believe. And it is thus proved.

*For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is all one: the glory equal, the majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is*  
*such*

*such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreate, incomprehensible, eternal, almighty; the Son and Holy Ghost uncreate, eternal, &c. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, and yet they are not three Gods but one God.*

THIS is the proof as it stands in the Creed. The amount of which is, that we must believe the trinity in unity, and the unity in trinity, because there are three persons in the Godhead, and yet but one God; or we must believe the trinity because there is a trinity of persons, and we must believe the unity because there is but one God. This you may think is a new way of arguing, but it has been distinguished of old by the name of *idem per idem*, or *obscurum per obscurius*: which, in english, signifies no argument, or worse than no argument at all.

CAN you make any more of this proof? Yes, the author tells us in his paraphrase  
upon

upon these words, that the meaning of them is this. " For the holy scriptures represent  
 " to us three distinct persons, the Father,  
 " the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and every  
 " one of these persons they represent to us  
 " as divine; ascribing to all alike every  
 " glorious attribute of divinity. They shew  
 " them all to be uncreated, incomprehen-  
 " sible, eternal and almighty: nay, they  
 " expressly assign to each the adorable titles  
 " of God and Lord." But the creed no-  
 where appeals to or makes mention of the  
 scriptures, but pronounces decisively that  
 there are three persons in glory equal, in  
 majesty coeternal; alike uncreate, incom-  
 prehensible and almighty, alike God and  
 Lord. If the author allows an appeal from  
 his creed to the scriptures, it is all that the  
 objectors to this creed require. But 'till  
 he has poinetd out the places where  
 the title of God almighty, of the su-  
 D preme

preme God, or the adorable titles of God and Lord are expresly assign'd in the scripture to three persons, his decisive affirmation leaves the Creed and us just where it found us.

*BUT let us go on. For like as we are compelled by the christian verity to acknowledge every person by himself to be God and Lord; so are we forbidden by the catholick religion to say there be three Gods or three Lords.*

*The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, neither made nor created, but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father and of the Son, neither made nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding.*

*And in this Trinity none is afore or after other, but the whole three persons are coeternal, together and coequal.*

*So that in all things as is aforesaid, the Trinity in Unity and the Unity in Trinity is to*  
*be*

*be worshipped.* “ So that it is evident, faith  
 “ our commentator, beyond contradiction,  
 “ that the proposition to be proved is true :  
 “ or that the doctrine of the trinity is a  
 “ part of the catholick faith.”

THIS is the author's clear chain of reasoning. But certainly if he had intended to burlesque this respectable creed, he could not have done it more effectually. The proposition to be proved, as he asserts, is that we are to worship one God in trinity and trinity in unity. This is itself a hard saying; hard to believe and hard to understand; and therefore wants both illustration and proof. Instead of which the creed goes on to explicate only and unfold the many difficulties, harder sayings and paradoxes that are involved in this, without solving or proving any of them. And then, when you are lost in mystery, and more and more obscurity gathers round you; the apologist

produces his conclusion out of the clouds.— You see now, it is evident beyond contradiction, that the proposition to be proved is true.

BUT the author has surely done injustice to his creed: which is by no means guilty of such bad reasoning as his apology represents it to be. The detail of articles which follow the first general proposition, which he says is the truth that is proved through the whole, hath no immediate relation to this proposition but to the words that follow it: which are *neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance*. The whole together stands thus; *The catholick faith is, that we worship one God in trinity and trinity in unity, neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance. For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, &c. is all one, &c.* Here the connection

nection is plain and clear. In believing the trinity you must not confound the persons nor divide the substance: for the persons are distinct and three in number, and the Godhead or substance is but one. The illative particle *For* introduces a reason, not for believing the trinity but for not confounding the persons or dividing the substance.

AND this is the tenor of the creed throughout; not to prove the articles that are to be believed, but to shew what is contained in this belief. Thus in the article that follows.—*Furthermore it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right faith is, that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ the Son of God is God and man. God of the substance of his Father, begotten before the worlds, and man of the substance of his mother, born in the world: perfect*

*fect God and perfect man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting: equal to the Father as touching his Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching his manhood, who although he be God and man, yet he is not two but one Christ: one, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh but by taking of the manhood into God: one altogether, not by confusion of substance but by unity of person.* The author, for reasons which we are left free to conjecture, hath left out this whole article both in the text and in his paraphrase.

It appears then evident beyond contradiction, that there is no proposition proved or attempted to be proved through this whole creed; that it's articles are laid down as in other creeds, without inferring their truth from clearer principles; that instead of being big with argument there is no pretence to argument in it; that instead of demonstration there is nothing but affirmation

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tion, and for reason we have only authority. And we must at last, however unwillingly, acknowledge that we are called upon in this formulary of faith, not only to believe the trinity but to believe it with all the circumstances, distinctions and modalities here specified; that we must distinguish carefully betwixt *made*, *created*, *begotten* and *proceeding*, and learn to apply these relative terms with precision to the several divine beings to whom they respectively belong, &c. For so the creed tells us in express terms, He that will be saved must *thus* think of the trinity.

It is true, that the author absolves us as far as his authority will go from entering into these nice distinctions, and from the obligation of believing them. “ A distinction, faith he, will naturally arise between the essential parts of the creed, which alone are the objects of our belief and

“ and the proofs of those parts. It is enough  
 “ if we assent to the truth to be proved,  
 “ though we may not acquiesce intirely in  
 “ the means of proof; as our own great  
 “ master (Mr. Locke) when too old to enter  
 “ upon a new and arduous study, is said to  
 “ have believed the *Principia* of our im-  
 “ mortal Geometrician, without understand-  
 “ ing their demonstrations †.” If then the  
 doctrines of this creed and the grounds upon  
 which they are to be believed, be a new, as  
 I fear it will be to most christians, and an  
 arduous study to all, they may, with the  
 doctor’s leave, let these proofs alone, and  
 believe the general doctrine of the trinity  
 without them. But then if these proofs are  
 only explications or explicit declarations  
 of what is to be believed, we must have his  
 leave likewise to let them alone, and to be-  
 lieve the trinity without them. In either  
 case the creed indeed will be usefess, but

† P. 82.

then

then it will be free from the charge of involving our christian faith “ in impenetrable obscurity and nice distinctions which cannot be comprehended.” And this, if the doctor pleases, we will accept as his apology for the Athanasian creed: but must take leave to offer it in our turn as an apology for not admitting all the more intricate parts of it. It is indeed the whole that his apology will amount to, even supposing it to be constructed upon true principles. For all that he claims to have proved from his creed and comment is, “ that the doctrine of the trinity is a part of the catholick faith:” and in his paraphrase upon it, we find none of those metaphysical distinctions with which our faith is charged in the creed itself. Here then, as far as appears, both you and I may believe nearly the same with this writer himself. I worship God as he doth, “ under the threefold relation of our creator, redeemer and  
E sanctifier.”

sanctifier †." I acknowledge him in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself; and in his Holy Spirit, presiding over his church, inspiring the apostles and prophets, leading us by his revealed word into all truth, and assisting and sanctifying the hearts of good men. I believe the scriptures and all that is revealed in them of this great mystery of Godliness, and sincerely pray to God to strengthen my faith in all the great truths which he hath brought to light in his gospel. And this I hope is sufficient for all the purposes of religion and the duties of a christian.

THE author hath given us a large chapter || upon necessary articles of faith, in which he candidly allows and hath fully proved, that believing in Jesus Christ as the son of God and the saviour of the world, is alone sufficient to qualify us for the denomination of christians, and to make us true members of the christian church. And I as readily

† P. 53. || P. 14.

grant

grant that this belief doth not supersede the belief of other articles, but rather supposes and implies it. But if it implies a belief in all necessary doctrines, is not this all that is necessary? To believe in Christ is to take him for our Lord and lawgiver; to make his gospel the rule of our faith and practice. This gospel is at large our christian creed: as it is our christian table of commandments. A disposition to believe, an assent already prepared, if I may so speak, to all the doctrines contained in it, is faith, as it resides in the hidden man of the heart. Where this principle rules and prevails in the mind, there is faith in it's full extent. It implies indeed, as the author rightly reminds us, an earnest desire to know all the doctrines contained in the scripture, but by no means an actual belief of all. The difference which he hath stated betwixt one age and another, betwixt the times of igno-

rance and the more enlightened days of christianity, we must make betwixt one man and another, betwixt the peasant and the scholar. All men have not opportunity or capacity to search the scriptures throughout. All cannot receive the more abstruse and mysterious doctrines, save they to whom it is given.

THIS then appears to me the one thing necessary, the one fundamental article of faith, comprizing virtually every other. He that takes the scripture for the rule of his faith gives the assent of his mind to all the articles of faith in one. He that acts up to this principle will extend his knowledge and his faith in religious truths as far as he can. If he err in understanding the more difficult parts of scripture, he may yet be a true believer. Different interpretations are put upon doctrines that are thought worthy of a place in the Apostle's creed itself.

The

The first of the following articles, *He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, He descended into hell*, may not be understood by many pious and true christians; and the latter we know has been interpreted in senses totally different, even by our church itself. Who then shall say what articles are necessary, and which if we do not believe faithfully we cannot be saved?

THE author hath endeavoured to illustrate his argument for believing explicitly all the doctrines of christianity, by asserting that there is a like inseparable connection and dependence betwixt the articles of faith that there is betwixt the duties of morality: all of which, tho' not equally important, are equally indispensable and necessary in practice, in order to constitute the character of virtue. I shall examine this parallel as it is drawn by the author, and endeavour to confirm the position I have laid down from the same principles.

“ THE

" THE case seems to be the same with re-  
 " gard to the speculative as it is with regard  
 " to the practical virtues. If we may be  
 " allowed to give the name of virtue to a  
 " right belief as we do to a right practice.  
 " There are virtues of different value. Some  
 " which are essential to the very being of a  
 " virtuous character; others which may be  
 " said rather to compleat than to form it.  
 " Virtues which no good man can be with-  
 " out, virtues which even the good man  
 " is sometimes less attentive to, but none  
 " which he can exclude from his system.  
 " Whilst we cultivate those of the first  
 " kind, we are not upon that account the  
 " more at liberty to indulge a neglect of  
 " others. They are not necessary because  
 " they compensate for the want of others,  
 " but on the contrary, because they are the  
 " basis of several subordinate virtues, and pre-  
 " pare the heart for the reception of all §."

§ P. 27.

THIS

THIS is somewhat embarrassed. I do not see how even the cardinal virtues, justice, fortitude, temperance, are connected with or supported by each other, or that those which it may be supposed he would call the subordinate virtues, such as humility, meekness, compassion, forgiveness, necessarily arise from any, or can be inferred from all of these: though I admit that the virtuous character will be imperfect where any of them is wanting. Nor if we would speak with philosophical precision, should I chuse to say that there are virtues of different value. Virtue is one principle residing, as I said of faith, in the hidden man of the heart. This principle is a steady determination to do what is right—the principle of obedience—of obedience to the will of God, to the rule of our nature, to reason and order. As far as our actions are connected with, derive or deviate from this principle, so far they

they are virtuous or otherwise. It is certain a man may be temperate, just, merciful and benevolent from a regard to health, character, or other merely human considerations, without any regard to duty, and therefore without any virtue at all. This therefore is, properly speaking, the only virtue. The rest are duties resulting from and dependent upon this, but are no farther virtuous than as they are connected with it. He that hath this principle rooted and grounded within him, hath every virtue in one—mercy, magnanimity, charity and liberality, tho' he may have never had the opportunity of exemplifying them in practice or shewing them to the world. It is the same to him who searcheth the heart and calleth the things which are not as though they were. This then I shall desire you to bear in mind while we go through the rest of the author's parallel.

“ IT

“ IF this is allowed, as it readily will be  
 “ with regard to action, it must be acknow-  
 “ ledged also with regard to faith. The  
 “ same train of reasoning which shews the  
 “ necessity of *every* virtue, will likewise  
 “ establish the necessity of *every* article of  
 “ faith. We must therefore allow or deny to-  
 “ gether in both cases. We must support *every*  
 “ article of faith, or give up *some* articles  
 “ of practical duty.”

“ THE apostle’s rule is good as well with  
 “ regard to the law of faith as that of obe-  
 “ dience. If we keep the whole law and  
 “ yet offend in one point we are guilty of  
 “ all. Our compliance with some cannot  
 “ justify a contempt of others †.”

THESE conclusions are most of them just.  
 But they will arise with more force and  
 clearness from the principles which I am  
 going to lay down. As submission to the  
 will of God is the whole of virtue, so sub-

† P. 27, 28.

mission to his word is the whole of faith. As the former of these principles is necessary to give our best actions the character of virtue; so the latter is necessary to sanctify every act of belief and to give it the character of religious faith. As in the former case it is not necessary to the virtuous character that every virtue should be exemplified in practice; so neither in the latter case is it necessary to a perfect faith that every article revealed in scripture should be explicitly believed. As our seeming best actions are but an equivocal proof of virtue; so an act of belief in this or that article of religion is but an uncertain evidence of a true faith. If we believe without evidence, without inquiry, or because our fathers have believed before us; there is no true faith in such belief. If the man whose heart standeth right, and cleaveth stedfastly to that which is good, may be said to have every virtue in

one

one, tho' in many instances it may not have been brought to the trial; so he that reverences the scripture and believeth with all his heart may be said to be orthodox in every article of faith, tho' many of them have never been brought to his knowledge or offered to his belief. If God may see in the heart of a good man every latent virtue, in the seed and principle, that has not been called into action; may he not read in the heart of a true believer an assent virtually given to the whole system of faith, tho' involuntary ignorance or error may have kept him a stranger to many religious truths? To God then, who seeth not as man seeth, we must leave it to decide what the faith is which shall save us. And it is vain for us to pronounce what proportion of faith in every one is required to his salvation.

BUT are there not articles of such great and general importance that every christian

must be supposed to believe them? Certainly there are. And I deny not that the doctrine of the trinity and the incarnation of our blessed Lord are of this number. But as the scriptures relating to these doctrines may be differently interpreted by men who equally reverence these sacred writings, and are equally impartial in their search after truth, different opinions may be embraced concerning them, by men whose faith is equally pure and undefiled, and who are therefore equally justified as believers in the sight of God.

THE importance of religious opinions is to be measured by the different degrees in which they serve to the uses of piety and virtue. These are the end or rather the substance of all religion. In proportion as any doctrine contributes to this end it is of importance in the religious life. If any man finds in himself the love of God and goodness

ness promoted by his believing these mysteries in the Athanasian form, it is of happy importance to him. I reverence his belief. But if receiving these doctrines in the plainest and most general form, we find in the work of our redemption enough to excite the highest love of God and our Redeemer, enough to exhaust all our gratitude to the divine goodness, and to carry our piety to the highest pitch to which it can be raised; every end of faith, every intention of this sacred doctrine seems answered by it. Whatever beyond this may be added to our faith nothing can be added to our piety: and therefore whatever more is believed seems of little importance in a religious view.

THE mind of man hath limits which it cannot pass. The passions or affections can be raised but to a certain pitch. There are objects too great for the imagination, and which therefore cannot be presented in all  
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their force to the mind. The eternity of hell torments is believed by many in the strictest and severest sense. But he that believes this in a limited or more qualified sense may perhaps feel as strong a motive to duty as the other. A million of years, or if you please a million of millions are but a day compared with this eternity; but when presented to the mind their influence shall be nearly equal. The reason is, that all beyond this can never be made an object to the imagination, which is the medium through which it's influence must be transmitted to the passions. Our fear cannot be excited by the greater object more than by the less. And he that will not be restrained from sin by the former, will, it is certain, never be moved by the latter.

LET us attend now to the impressions which the common creed of christians is calculated and may be supposed to make on

a mind that is reverently disposed to receive it: and see whether any farther improvements in piety and religion may be expected from the sublimer doctrines of this creed.

WHEN I am taught that God is eternal and almighty, a being without beginning and that can never have an end, that he is the father of the creation and at the head of all worlds; my heart sinks within me at the thought of a being so tremendously great and amazing. When I am told that this gracious power interests himself in my happiness, and hath made me to contemplate his glory and to adore him for ever, it dilates with joy and hope at the thoughts of a blessed immortality. When I learn farther that God hath sent his Son into the world to unfold these great truths in all their light, to redeem men when lost in sin and error, and to recall them to the knowledge of himself and of their duty; to give them a law  
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pure and perfect like himself, and adapted in every article to purify and exalt our nature, and armed with such sanctions as affect our well being for ever; when I see this law tempered with mercy and goodness in condescension to the merits of our Redeemer, and reflect on his humiliation, the degradation to which he submitted by taking our nature upon him, and the sufferings which he underwent for our sakes; I find every passion of hope, and fear, and love directed to objects worthy of an immortal spirit, every thought subdued and brought into obedience by a faith so rational and interesting, so important in it's objects and in all it's consequences, that nothing seems possible to be added which can give it more influence on the mind. Is it necessary to any ends of piety or religion, that we must believe farther the personalities of the trinity as they are laid down in this creed; that the most  
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high God, consisting of three persons in one nature, became one person with a perfect man, one person in two natures, by taking the manhood into God ; that God sent, not the same in person, but the same numerical God with himself to become flesh and dwell among us, which seem to be the doctrines of this creed ? Our wonder and amazement are here indeed raised to the highest, the mind is set at gaze, and our faith itself becomes affrighted ; but what sentiments of piety or devotion are raised, or how is our love and reverence for the deity promoted by it.

BUT an uniformity of belief in some considerable degree seems a necessary bond of publick communion, without which christians can scarce be supposed to join in worship together. And this must give importance to such articles, an agreement in which is necessary to this end. This is certainly right. But in the application of this principle

ciple men have generally transferred this importance from the first acknowledged truths of christianity to those which distinguish their own sect or party. These, however disputable, have been usually made the test of orthodoxy, however remotely connected with the true end and design of religion, have been thought most essential to religious worship. Hence instead of uniting in christian charity and communion for the sake of the great principles in which they agreed, they have usually thought it a duty to hate and persecute and to put away from among them those with whom they differed in other matters. There cannot however be a plainer truth than that the doctrines in which all christian churches have agreed, ought to be held of the first rank and importance in religion, and that these are sufficient to ground a system of christian worship upon. And had men been content  
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with these, with the simplicity of faith and worship which were established in the first ages of christianity, without guarding against supposed heresies by publick creeds and anathemas, we should, I am persuaded, have seen more christian piety as well as charity in the world. Every truth unopposed and unespoused by party-zeal and faction would have established itself by it's own evidence. The kingdom of Christ would have enlarged it's borders by preventing prejudice and disarming opposition from without; and the christian name have been every where a praise and honour in the earth.

FROM this point of view then we shall perhaps better determine what articles are essential to the christian faith than from any other. Whatever are thought sufficient for christian communion, nothing more ought to be required by any church or christian society, or pronounced to be universally

necessary to salvation. These then from the nature of public worship must be few in number, must be plain and obvious to every capacity. Whatever is necessary here must be necessary to all. And what is necessary to all must be level to the capacities of all. Men must not be sent to schools of divinity to qualify them for christian communion. God hath not made one religion for the wise and learned and another for the vulgar and illiterate. The publick forms of worship must therefore be supposed to condescend to the common state of christians, and to prescribe nothing to be asked in prayer or offered in praise and adoration but what is adapted to the common faith as well as the common wants and circumstances of all. The apostle seems to suppose that where there is a christian society animated with the true christian spirit; where there is the same God the object of worship, the  
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same Lord and Saviour acknowledged as the author and finisher of the faith into which we are baptized; where there are the same hopes in the next life as well as the same blessings to commemorate and pray for in this; it is a duty incumbent on all to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. *I beseech you*, says he, *to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love: endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling: one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all and in you all* †. I shall therefore leave it with you as a question that merits a farther discussion, whether those who agree in the doctrines of the one God; the divine authority of our blessed Saviour; the commu-

† Eph. iv. 1, &c.

nion, or communication of the graces, of the Holy Spirit; the sabbath and sacraments of the church; the doctrine of repentance and remission of sins, which includes in it that of our redemption through Christ and his mediation with the Father; the general resurrection and the life everlasting; whether these have not all that is necessary to christian communion; whether they who agree in a general belief of these doctrines may not consistently, and ought not if possible to join in the same worship together; however they may differ in the mode of explaining many of these articles, or in the consequences they deduce from them: or however they may prefer some rites and ceremonies to others, and vary in their opinions about indifferent matters. The apostle's rule is, *Him that is weak in the faith receive ye †*, without judging or condemning him for his opinion: that is, reject him not

† Rom. xiv. 1.

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from communion, but receive him as a brother, and suffer him to enjoy his opinions 'till better thought or information have removed his doubts. If indeed there be a christian church which hath set up another rule of faith besides the scriptures, other objects of worship beside the true God, other mediators betwixt God and man beside the man Christ Jesus; we cannot join in communion with or give her the right hand of fellowship, without departing from the first principles of faith and worship. But I must here be explicit in declaring that I bring no such accusation against the advocates for this creed, tho' the charge of varying or multiplying the object of our worship has been lately brought by many against it. The unity of the Godhead clearly asserted and guarded in it, ought, I think, to free it from this imputation. They who worship Christ as God their redeemer, and the  
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Holy Ghost as God their sanctifier, must, if they conform to the principles of this creed, mean to worship one God with the Father, however difficult they may find it to bring their ideas together. Dr. Rotheram hath kindly lent his hand to help them over this difficulty, by marking it as the peculiar distinction of the christian revelation, that “ it instructs us where we are to pay  
 “ our gratitude for the inestimable blessings  
 “ of redemption, &c. by directing that God  
 “ should now be worshipped under the  
 “ threefold relation of our creator, redeemer  
 “ and sanctifier || .” Whether his Athanasian brethren will think this threefold relation or trinity of characters in the deity, sufficient for the faith and worship of a christian, I am not concerned to inquire. But however this may be, however they may worship three persons, or three characters in the deity, by uniting these in the one

God they must be allowed to mean, however difficult it may be to explain, what they profess, to pay their worship to the one supreme God. This charge therefore, which hath by some been magnified into idolatry, I think to be unmerited and highly injurious to the honour of our church: which hath surely deserved as well from the friends of truth and liberty as any christian church hath done; which where it hath erred, hath erred in common with all other churches since the dark ages of christianity; and hath gone as far in reforming religion and restoring it to its true principles as any church hath gone; and which, if purged in her doctrines and worship from a few human mixtures, would perhaps be the fittest of all others to be the centre of union among christians.

BUT to return to our subject, the importance of believing certain articles of faith hath, I fear, been frequently estimated from

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the difficulty of believing them. As every virtue derives its comparative value from the difficulties surmounted in the practice of it, so men are apt to think there is a merit in giving a ready assent to religious paradoxes and seeming inconsistencies, and in believing more than others believe. Hence it hath been thought meritorious to believe all the contradictions implied in the doctrine of transubstantiation, and it is to be feared that many hope, by this sacrifice of their reason, to atone for defects in the weightier matters of the law. But this voluntary humility and will-worship who hath required at our hands? If we receive for doctrines the commandments of men, if we fondly believe more than is revealed, to shew the flexibility of our reason and our submission to the divine authority, this supererogation of faith, like that of works, will profit us nothing.

Dr. Rotheram hath himself made it a doubt, whether faith can properly be called  
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a virtue. And more properly speaking it is, according to the distinction I have made above, to be called a duty—a part of the obedience we owe to God. As much as there is of piety, humility and a desire to know the will and word of God in our performance of this duty, so much is there and only so much of virtue in it. But the bare act of believing the most mysterious doctrines when revealed by the word of God, is of so easy practice, or rather so natural and necessary, that the virtue of it must rank in a very low degree of merit. To believe upon clear and adequate evidence is indeed no other than a natural effect of a natural cause.

THE articles of religion when believed become so many principles of action, and from their influence in practice their different importance is, as I have already said, chiefly to be estimated. But the acting steadily under these principles is another duty distinct from

that of believing : the exercise of which, tho' often called a trial of our faith, is more properly a test of our firmness of mind, and of the force of the virtuous principle within us. When archbishop Cranmer sunk for a time under the persecution of his enemies ; it was not his faith but his fortitude that failed him. His belief was still the same.

When our belief in the promises of God rises into a full trust and absolute reliance on his goodness, on his word and faithfulness ; and this inspires us with a courage equal to the fiercest dangers and most powerful temptations ; this principle is then combined with the principle of virtue, and like armour to the loadstone both directs and augments its force. And this compound principle it is which is so highly magnified under the name of faith in the epistle to the Hebrews and other parts of scripture : which includes in it the whole of christian virtue and perfection ;

tion ; but may surely be supposed to exist in all its force without the belief of such doctrines as are merely speculative : such as may be believed without any previous virtue, and without producing any virtuous fruit ; and which therefore if we believe neither are we the better, nor if we believe not are we the worse.

IN general we may assert, that this boasted faith and forward belief of things which pass our understanding, is either no faith at all, or a sacrifice which costs us nothing. How many believe, or think they believe, the mysteries we have been considering, without ever inquiring what foundation there is in scripture for such belief ? I will not include in this censure those who from their situation in life, or want of abilities, are incapable of this inquiry. These, if they believe in their teachers, or in the church as true interpreters of scripture, have the best reason they  
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can in their circumstances have for their belief. But how few of those who are qualified for this inquiry have gone farther than their creed or catechism for this belief? And all these I shall hope will claim no virtue or importance to their faith from the difficulty of believing.

BUT do they indeed believe the doctrines which they profess to believe? If faith be a rational assent, by which I mean only the assent of the understanding whether well grounded or not, it must imply that we understand the terms of the proposition to be believed as well as the reasons for believing it. But those who have never inquired cannot pretend to the last of these conditions, for they have never asked themselves why they believe. And those who have no motive for believing but the fear whether of inquisitions or anathemas, will never alledge these as the reasons of their belief.

belief. And the first of these conditions leads me to doubt whether those who have examined and think themselves well grounded in the faith, are really, with respect to some of the more mysterious doctrines of our creeds, believers or not.

*Trinity* is the abstract of *three*; and though appropriated by use to one sacred meaning, may be applied indifferently to any three beings of the same kind. We may say a trinity of men as well as a triumvirate. Nor doth a God in trinity convey any distinct meaning more than a man in trinity, 'till it is explained by telling us that there are three persons of the same kind or the same divine nature in the Godhead. But what is the idea conveyed here by person? Plainly that of a thinking conscious being. A person must be a living intelligent substance. Can you apply to it any other meaning? Are there then three intelligent substances

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in the one God? This we are forbidden to believe: for it is dividing the substance. Dr. Rotheram must therefore annex some other idea to the word person; which he hath not disclosed. But those who cannot catch the same idea and know not what the word *person* means, if they believe the doctrine thus laid down must believe they know not what. The proposition to them hath no meaning. Their faith has none: or it is no faith.

THE doctor hath laid it down as an incontestible truth, that “it is contrary to  
 “ the principles of true religion held by all  
 “ to say, that there can be three distinct and  
 “ independent beings who can be stiled God  
 “ and Lord, or to whom the attributes of  
 “ uncreated, incomprehensible, eternal and  
 “ almighty can be applied †.” Now this is plainly asserting, either that there are not three distinct beings in the Godhead, or

† P. 27.

that one or more of those to whom the attributes of uncreated, eternal and almighty are applied, is a dependent being. Or will he deny that three distinct persons are three distinct beings? But on whom can an eternal, almighty, uncreated being be dependent? Surely the author's ideas are here very confused. And what must we think of his faith in the trinity? He believes that there are three uncreated, eternal, almighty persons in the Godhead, and yet asserts that it is contrary to the principles of true religion to say, that there are three distinct independent beings who can be stiled God and Lord. Yet this, would you believe it, is one of the principles from which he deduces his demonstration of a trinity in unity. A principle which, if I mistake not, an Antitrinitarian will be glad to under-write and perhaps adopt with a Q. E. D. for his conclusion.

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BUT I ought not perhaps to measure other mens ideas by my own, nor to decide upon the merits of this creed from Dr. Rotheram's apology. If therefore any man believes it upon better grounds and with more distinct ideas, I impeach not his faith. He that is able to receive it let him receive it. All that I plead for is, the like candour and charity to those whose faith does not come up to this standard; that a man may believe all that the scriptures require him to believe of the divinity of the Son and Holy Spirit, without understanding the doctrine of the hypostatick union, or believing it with that precision which is here required: in a word, that a man may be a good christian without believing the Athanasian creed; and that therefore they who reject it are not to be reckoned amongst unbelievers, and sentenced to perdition as the enemies of God and religion.

I have given you some reasons and could give many more, for doubting whether any one ever did or possibly can believe all that this creed precisely requires, I mean not with the mouth only, but with the understanding also: and therefore earnestly wish that they who profess this belief, and think themselves well grounded in it, would permit themselves to doubt for a moment, and seriously to enquire whether their understanding and their faith have kept pace with each other, and what their belief in these articles amounts to: but above all, whatever they believe, that they would add to their faith charity, without which, if they have all faith, so that they could remove mountains it will profit them nothing. For I must assert, that this is *above all things* necessary and fundamental in the christian system: the apostle having expressly decided that of the three christian graces, charity is the greatest.

And our Lord hath marked it as the first distinctive character of his disciples, that they have love one for another.

You will readily perceive that my concern in this case is not so much for him that suffers wrong as for him that doth the wrong: who while he thinks himself defending the faith may unawares be violating the most essential duties of a christian, and incur the guilt of judging the servants of another master. For those who are pronounced guilty, and stand condemned by this creed, I have no pain or solicitude. The signals which it hangs out of impending vengeance when unattended with the powers of persecution and inquisition, give little alarm in present, and create no apprehensions for the future. There is a principle in human nature which will stand its ground against all the sophisms and subtleties of school divinity, and will not suffer the mind

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to be persuaded and reason'd into guilt and fear where no fear is. And this is common sense. This will tell us that a man may have a good mind and good meaning without believing mysteries of which he can form no ideas: and that an Athanasian who believes all the propositions in this creed is not a whit more to be trusted than a plain man who believes his bible at large. Such an one may give you the hearing, but when you have read to him all that Dr. Rotheram and Dr. Waterland have written on this subject, will never be convinced that not to believe a trinity in unity is as bad as murder or adultery. The mind of man, conscious of every perfection and imperfection in itself, knows and feels that whatever contributes to it's perfection, it's dignity and moral character, and this only is duty; and whatever gives evidence to it is virtue: that this only can recommend him to the favour, and the

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want of it expose him to the displeasure of the deity: and that this includes in it the whole of duty and obligation.

AND that these sentiments invariably prevail in every man's mind, notwithstanding the specious arguments that are used to give the importance of duty to speculation and opinion, we may appeal to universal practice and experience; which are a more certain test of mens real thoughts and principles than verbal professions. Doth Dr. Rotheram, think you, when he visits his sick parishioners, inquire with as much solicitude whether they are orthodox in the faith, as whether they have led a sober and godly life: or exhort them with the same earnestness to a right faith in the trinity as he would to repentance and amendment of life? If this be as difficult a duty as any other, and more than any necessary to salvation, how comes it not to be a part of our daily prayers,

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that God would enable us by his assisting grace to believe rightly the mysteries of the catholick faith, and to preserve us from the sin and danger of believing what we ought not to believe? Were a form of prayer to be composed in the language of this creed,

‘ Teach me, O God, not only to adore thy infinite goodness in sending thy only begotten Son to redeem us, and thy Holy Ghost to be our guide and comforter, but enable me likewise to believe that thou consistest of three distinct persons conjoined in one substance: that all of these are uncreated and eternal, but one begotten and one proceeding. Teach me carefully to avoid confounding the persons or dividing the substance,’ &c. I leave you to judge, whether any sober-minded christian could without hesitation join in such a form.

You will, I am sure, do me the justice to believe, that I take no pleasure in depreciating

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or complaining of the forms of our church. There are few public virtues which I more respect than a spirit of conformity : by which I mean, a temper disposed to submit to the public wisdom and authority, and not given to change or innovation. But it is surely agreeable to this social principle, to wish for a worship to which all may conform. Human establishments will ever have the marks of human weakness upon them : and, if not sometimes revised and redressed, will by length of time and the inventions of men, become more vitiated and depraved. Allowances should therefore be made on the one hand for imperfections that are unavoidable ; and concessions on the other, that when defects and errors are seen and acknowledged they may be supplied and corrected. The religion of Moses, though of divine authority, became in a course of 1500 years, so much corrupted by human mixtures, as  
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to be made of none effect through their traditions ; and was therefore *disannulled because of the weakness and unprofitableness thereof* \*.

In the same space of time the christian religion itself became so corrupted as to want to be restored to its first principles. This reformation was happily attempted : but was left imperfect. Its imperfections are too visible to be palliated, and are now universally acknowledged. In the present advanced state of learning and knowledge, every thing must submit to the test of close and severe criticism, and religious opinions will be scrutinized with as little favour as any other. It is therefore a time to wish that our establishment was purged from every erroneous mixture, from every thing really exceptionable, that the adversary may have no advantage when he seeketh occasion against us. It is a time to hope, that with all the superior advantages we have acquired since the time of the re-

\* Heb. vii. 18.

formation, when learning and science but began to dawn after a long night of ignorance; with all the accession of critical knowledge in the scriptures and the light derived from thence upon religion in general; when every difficulty, and doubts and objections of every kind have been stated and examined; and in every question the moments on each side are ready at hand to be compared and balanced; and when there are as able hands to improve these advantages, and men as capable and qualified for their learning, judgment and temper as the church can ever hope to be blessed with: it may surely be hoped, that the publick face of religion may be made to appear, if not in perfect beauty, yet free from every conspicuous blemish, and approaching somewhat nearer to purity and perfection.

Whatever restrictions are thought necessary to be laid on those who are appointed to be  
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teachers of the word and doctrine ; which yet surely in their present state are a burden heavy to be borne, and in truth ignominious and reproachful both to the church which submits to and the state which continues to impose them ; I say, whatever restrictions of this kind may be deemed necessary for the ministers of the church, we may wish her service to be free and open to all believers ; that, if possible, nothing which offends should enter into it ; but that all who agree in the great truths of religion may with one heart and one mind glorify God together, and unite in the same worship with the full consent of their minds, of their reason and conscience, which cannot bend to authority. This alone would I am persuaded conduce much towards putting an end to all contentions and divisions, and towards restoring the credit of religion and piety which are so deplorably sinking among us.

RATIONAL religion is the glory and perfection of our nature, and must be so of all, even to the highest of intelligent beings. This when seen in practice or contemplated in theory will touch the mind and captivate the heart. Christianity hath taught this rational religion to the world: and is the only institution, after the Jewish, that ever taught a worship worthy of God and man. The love of God and man are the great catholick principles, which it is the avowed intention of this religion to establish in the hearts of men. This is declared to be the end of all it's doctrines, institutions and precepts. These then above all should be kept in view in all human forms and establishments of religion. These should be the lesson held out in example and recommended through all. At least nothing which interferes with these principles; nothing, for instance, which debases or brings in question the moral character of the deity, or which contracts

contracts our charity and good-will towards men should be admitted into them. A publick worship, formed upon these principles and animated with this spirit, as it must be open to all, must win the esteem if not the concurrence of all: and would perhaps do more towards reforming and converting the world than can be done by human authority in any other way.

THE devotional parts of scripture are in sentiment and language the most simple, rational and sublime that can be imagined. These our church hath happily adopted in many parts of her liturgy and imitated in others. From this plentiful source improvements, if wanted, may be had without end. And by keeping this model always in view, rejecting every thing of doubtful disputation, or leaving it expressed in the terms of scripture, her service might be freed from all objection; she might defy the scorn and malice of her enemies; and spare some  
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shame and confusion to those of her friends who are most anxious for her honour and prosperity.

THUS SIR, I have given you freely the result of my thoughts upon the subjects which have lately engaged our conversation: and have I believe more than fulfilled the promise which you charge me with in your letter. If in any thing my sentiments appear singular or new, they ought to be suspected: and I wish you to canvass them with the severity of a friend, by whose judgment I hope to correct my own; and from whom I have now a right to expect information in my turn.

I am affectionately yours.

F I N I S.

E R R A T A.

P. 17. last line but one, for *poinetd*, read *pointed*.  
 P. 56. l. 6. for *known ot*, read *known not*.

